

Conversation about the Application of the Buddha's teachings.
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A. The Buddha taught that there is no 'self', no person. How can his teachings help me to accept difficult situations in life? I am attached to people. When I lose dear people through death I am sad. When other people speak harsh words to me I become angry and I feel disappointed.

B. We would like to be ~~xxxxxx~~ be able to direct the events of our life. We would like other people to be kind to us all the time. But in reality there are no people, only phenomena which arise because of their own conditions and which are beyond control. Whatever phenomenon arises falls away immediately, it is impermanent. If one develops a right understanding of the phenomena of our life the clinging to the idea of 'self' or person will decrease. Then one will become more patient, even if one has to face difficult situations. ~~xxxxxx~~

A. I find it hard to accept that there are no people, only phenomena which arise because of their own conditions. Especially when I am in the company of someone who is dear to me it seems that I do not want to accept that there is no person there, only phenomena.

B. Clinging to our own views prevents us from seeing things as they are. You may believe that the body belongs to a person or self, but you can experience that you cannot ~~xxxxxx~~ you be master of your body. You cannot prevent it from decaying, ~~xxxxxx~~ you cannot prevent it from decaying. ~~xxxxxx~~ Changes occur moment

A. I keep on thinking of people, but how can I prove that they do not exist?

B. Can you see a person?

A. It seems that I see people this and again, or there are no people what is it then we are seeing?

B. What is experienced through the eyes is only colour or visible object. By visible object I do not mean a 'thing'. I mean everything that is visible, that appears through the eyes. Can people feelings on the eyesense?

A. No, but it seems that I immediately think of people while I am seeing.

B. There can be only one moment of consciousness at a time, experiencing one object, seeing experienced what is visible and then it falls away immediately to be succeeded by another moment of consciousness. When one pays attention to shape and form it is not seeing but thinking of a concept, an idea. Seeing, ~~xxxxxx~~ cannot experience a person.

Let us now talk about what is experienced through the ears. What can be directly experienced when we listen to someone's talking?

A. I hear words.

B. But is there more? What is experienced through the ear-sense by the consciousness when hearing. Hearing of words arises at least at moments, although this hearing is conditioned by hearing, it is

different from hearing.

~~Not knowing more about seeing and hearing~~

A. Is it helpful for my daily life to know more about seeing and hearing?

B. Seeing and hearing are realities of our daily life. On account of what we see or hear many defilements are bound to arise, such as attachment, aversion, jealousy or stinginess. Should we not know more about all realities which arise?

A. The Buddha taught that there is no self, but who is seeing, hearing or thinking?

B. It is the seeing which sees.

It is the hearing which hears.

It is the thinking which thinks.

A. Can such knowledge help me to become less attached to all I experience through the senses?

B. Attachment to the objects experienced through the senses can only be eradicated at a later stage. First the wrong view of 'self' has to be eradicated. The clinging to 'self' is so deeply rooted. Even when we do not think ~~about 'self', there is no way we can be~~ ^{it is mine}, we are bound to ~~cling to~~ have wrong view of realities. ~~Do we realize already that~~ ^{our life is} ~~Don't we hold on to the idea of 'person', instead of~~ ^{realizing that there are only ever-changing phenomena?} Right understanding of the reality appearing at the present moment can eventually eradicate wrong view.

A. This kind of understanding seems to be a goal which is far away. How can I develop it?

B. First one should know the object one should develop right understanding of. What do you think is the object of right understanding?

A. I think that we should understand what is real. But what is real? I always thought that the world full of people was the real world, but now I begin to understand that people are not real.

B. There are ~~only~~ mental phenomena experiencing an object and physical phenomena which do not experience anything. All those ~~phenomena~~ phenomena arise and then fall away, they do not last. 'Person' is not a reality, it is a concept created by our thinking. This way of thinking is conditioned by memory of past experiences.

Thus, there is nobody here and nobody there, no matter how many people there seem to be around us all the time. Through right understanding of realities our world full of people falls apart.

A. Can you explain the difference between a reality which can be directly experienced and a concept we can think of but which is not a reality?

B. Hardness, for example, is a physical phenomenon which is real for everybody. It has its own characteristic which can be experienced through the bodysense, no matter we call it hardness or give it any other name. Seeing is a mental phenomenon which experiences visible object. It has its own characteristic, ^{it is} real for everybody. Seeing is always seeing, no matter we call it seeing or not. Mental

phenomena and physical phenomena which can be directly experienced as they appear one at a time through the senses or through the mind, ~~these~~ are 'absolute realities' (in Pali: paramattha dhammas). Person, animal or tree are ~~names~~ names which denote concepts or ideas. They are not realities which can be directly experienced. They belong to the world of 'conventional truths'.

A. What do you mean by ~~conventional~~ conventional truth?

B. In our ^{daily} conventional language in daily life we use names such as person, animal or tree in order to make ourselves understood by our fellowmen. We handle things like chairs, pen and paper in our daily life. However, we should realize that these are not real in the absolute sense.

A. But I get hold of my pen and I use it. What is real?

B. When you touch it, what do you experience?

A. Hardness.

B. Does your pen have a smell?

A. Yes, I experience odour through the nose.

B. When you lick ^{it} your pen, what appears?

A. I experience flavour through the tongue.

B. Through the six doorways of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body sense and mind different phenomena are experienced one at a time. They have ~~their~~ their own characteristics which can be directly experienced, without having to think about them. They are real for everybody.

A. So, I am handling phenomena, not a pen.

B. Can you still write?

A. Yes, everything is as usual.

B. That is right, our daily life does not have to change, but understanding of what is real in the absolute sense can be developed. What we call pen are different phenomena which arise and then fall away, although we do not notice this. Hardness we just touched has fallen away already. We experience hardness again but that is already a different hardness. We smell odour again and again, and we do not notice that odour has fallen away and that there is already a different odour.

A. The body is a concept but there must be something which is real.

B. When you touch it, what do you experience?

A. Hardness.

B. Does it have a smell?

A. Yes, smell can be experienced through the nose.

B. So, just like your pen, the body consists of different ~~phenomena~~ physical phenomena which can be experienced one at a time. Even so what we call mind are different mental phenomena which do not stay.

X. Although you know that in the absolute sense, there is no person, can you still talk to people?

A. Yes, how could I stop talking to people?

B. We can talk and laugh, but at the same time we can develop understanding of what appears at the present moment.

A. How can we know different phenomena one at a time? I am used

to thinking of many at a time.

B. When mindfulness arises it is aware of one reality at a time.

A. What is mindfulness?

B. Mindfulness (in Pali: sati) ~~arises together with each wholesome consciousness~~ is non-forgetfulness of what is wholesome, it keeps us from unwholesomeness. When there is generosity there is also mindfulness which remembers to be generous. There may be opportunities for generosity but when there is forgetfulness we waste such opportunities. Mindfulness arises when we keep the precepts, when we study the teachings and also when right understanding of realities is being developed.

A. What is the task of mindfulness when right understanding of realities is being developed?

B. It remembers to be aware of the reality which appears at the present moment.

A. How do I know the difference between forgetfulness of realities and mindfulness of them?

B. When you, for example, hear a loud noise caused by a car, is there one reality appearing or are you absorbed in your thoughts?

A. I usually think of the origin of the sound. I may have a experience of a 'mental ^{image} picture' of a car. I forget to be mindful of ~~one~~ realities, such as sound or hearing.

B. Mostly we live in the world of concepts and ideas, of 'conventional truths'. At such moments understanding of what is real cannot be developed. Sometimes mindfulness may arise and then it is aware of one reality at a time. It can be sound, hearing, ~~thinking~~ or any reality which appears at the present moment. When there is thinking of a concept ^(such as a car) we should remember that thinking is conditioned and that it is a reality which has its own characteristic. The concept thinking thinks of is not real, but thinking is and thus it can be object of mindfulness.

A. What are the right conditions for mindfulness? Should I do something special in order to be mindful?

B. You have an interest in the Dhamma and this interest is conditioned by previous moments of listening to the Dhamma, studying and considering it. All such moments are never lost, they are accumulated. When it is the right time they can condition a moment of mindfulness of one reality. We do not have to try to be aware, it is mindfulness, not self, which is aware. We do not have to do anything special in order to be aware. ~~If we think~~ When we think of creating conditions for mindfulness are we not clinging to an idea of self who is aware? We may be inclined to think of mindfulness in the future instead of beginning to be aware at this very moment. Realities cannot be clearly understood in the beginning, but at least awareness can begin now. There are six doorways and realities appear through these doorways. ~~What~~ What appears now, through which doorway? Is there no seeing now? There can be awareness of it in order to eliminate the idea of 'I see'.

A. Do mindfulness and understanding have different tasks?

B. Mindfulness remembers to be aware of the reality appearing at the present moment. Understanding ~~as the function of knowing the true nature~~ ^{understands its true nature,} ~~of reality~~. Whenever there is development of understanding ~~a reality~~ there has to be mindfulness at the same time. Thus realities can gradually be known as they are: as conditioned phenomena which are impermanent and not self.

A. How can one directly experience the arising and falling away of realities? There is seeing now, but it seems to last for a while.

B. Do you have a clear understanding of the reality of seeing? If that is not the case its impermanence cannot be realized. There is seeing now and it experiences visible object. Seeing is not the same as visible object but can you experience their different characteristics as they appear one at a time?

A. It seems that seeing and visible object are always together. How could I separate them?

B. Seeing and visible object are different realities. Seeing experiences something, it experiences visible object, whereas visible object itself does not experience anything. There can be mindfulness of one characteristic at a time. When both realities seem to appear together there is no mindfulness.

Understanding develops stage by stage. The ~~realization of the~~ impermanence of realities can only be realized at a later stage. First different realities should be clearly distinguished from each other. When seeing appears, it can be realized as only mental phenomenon, no self who sees. When visible object appears, there can be mindfulness of it, so that it is known as only a physical phenomenon, not a person, not a thing.

A. Why do you ~~say~~ use the word 'only'?

B. In order to stress that there is no person, no self. We usually think of a person or a body as a 'whole', instead of realizing that there are only different elements which do not stay/ and do not belong to a self. The ~~no~~ word 'only' can remind us that detachment is the goal.

We read in the 'Kindred Sayings' (IV, Saṃyattana-vagga, First Fifty, Ch I, par. 1) that the Buddha said to the monks:

...The eye, monks, is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is ill. What is ill, that is void of the self. What is void of the self, that is not mine: I am not it; it is not myself. That is how it is to be regarded with perfect insight of what it really is.

The same is said with regard to the other doorways. The Buddha then said:

...So seeing, monks, the well-taught Ariyan disciple is repelled by eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Being repelled by them, he lusts not for them. Not lusting he is set free. In this freedom comes insight of being free. Thus he realizes:--'Rebirth is destroyed, lived is the righteous life, done is the task, for life in those conditions there is no hereafter.'

Through right understanding all clinging can be eradicated and there are no more conditions for rebirth.

A. If I realize that what is seen is only visible object can it help me to lead a more wholesome life?

B. When we look at our house, our furniture, our belongings, we are inclined to think that we are the owners of these things. Such way of thinking can condition many defilements. We want to have more and more, we are never satisfied. Or we may be stingy about our possessions. In reality we do not possess anything. What is seen is only visible object, a reality which does not belong to anyone; it falls away as soon as it has arisen. We cannot take it with us, it can only be seen.

A. How can I apply the Buddha's teachings when I am irritated about someone ~~sxxx~~ who behaves in an unpleasant way?

B. Not a person is disagreeable, but it is his unwholesome consciousness which conditions him to be such. We all accumulated ~~xxx~~ different tendencies and these accumulations condition the arising of different types of consciousness. If we start to understand that there is no person, only conditioned phenomena we will be less absorbed in what others do or say. Right understanding can eliminate the idea of 'I see a person' or 'I am talking to a person'.

Actually our life is one moment of experiencing an object. Each moment falls away immediately and will never come back anymore. We cannot change the reality which has arisen already, it has been conditioned. If we understand this we will be less disappointed if life is not as we would like it to be. There can be awareness of any reality, even if it is unpleasant. What about this moment?

A. When I am with many people, I am distracted and I think that it is too difficult to be aware.

B. We should not expect many moments of mindfulness, but ~~there are always~~ it can arise when there is right understanding ~~of what~~ about the object of awareness. There are always realities appearing, no matter we are alone or with many people. I have to go to many cocktail parties and also then there can sometimes be mindfulness. Is there no sound, no seeing, no hardness, time and again? Being in the company of many people is like a test, an examination we have to pass. We have to apply what we learnt. The truth is not merely in the textbook, it is to be realized now, in daily life.
